UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General begins first official visit to Finland, following meetings with Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, UNHCR and High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva.

+ Senior United Nations official to consult with Tajik opposition leaders in Teheran from 12 to 14 January, in preparation for upcoming inter-Tajik talks.

+ African leaders express support for International Tribunal for Rwanda at Nairobi summit; back creation of transit camps to absorb Rwandese refugees returning from neighbouring countries.

+ Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for Elaboration of International Convention to Combat Desertification begins two-week session at Headquarters.

+ International staff and United Nations volunteers working at UNOSOM II headquarters to be moved to Mogadishu airport.

+ WFP and Catholic Relief Services sign working agreement on collaboration in emergency and long-term relief operations.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today arrived in Helsinki on his first official visit to Finland, according to a United Nations spokesman. Before leaving Geneva, the Secretary-General met with the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters and discussed the chapter on disarmament in his recent position paper on peace-keeping. He also met with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sadako Ogata to discuss the situation in Rwandese refugee camps. A meeting with United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights José Ayala Lasso focused on the situations in Rwanda, Colombia and Guatemala.

Tomorrow, the Secretary-General will have a range of meetings with senior Finnish Government officials, the spokesman said. He will also speak at the

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opening ceremony of the Conference of Nordic Countries in the United Nations for Peace and Development.

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A United Nations spokesman today announced that Raymond Sommereyns, Director in the Department of Political Affairs, would visit Teheran from 12 to 14 January for consultations with Tajik opposition leaders. The visit is a follow-up to the consultations undertaken by Special Envoy Ramiro Piriz-Ballon with President Emomali Rakhmonov and Tajik government officials in Dushanbe in late December. It is intended to prepare for the fourth round of inter-Tajik talks, to be held in Moscow later this month.

In that connection, the United Nations has appealed to all parties to abide by their commitments under the agreement on the cessation of hostilities which was concluded in Teheran last year. The agreement, and the mandate of the United Nations Mission of Observers in Tajikistan (UNMOT), will expire on 6 February. The spokesman stressed the importance of the inter-Tajik talks, saying they would have a bearing on the Secretary-General's upcoming report on UNMOT.

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The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Rwanda, Shahryar Khan, yesterday returned to Kigali after attending a seven-nation summit on the country's refugee problem in Nairobi, according to a United Nations spokesman. The summit was attended by the Heads of State of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, and by the Prime Minister of Zaire. The United Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were also present as observers.

The African leaders expressed support for the International Tribunal for Rwanda, and for the creation of transit camps to gradually absorb refugees returning from neighbouring countries, the spokesman continued. After returning to Kigali, Special Representative Khan had meetings with Rwanda's leaders to discuss the follow-up to the summit.

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The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa yesterday began a two-week session at Headquarters. The Committee adopted its agenda and the programme of work for the first week.

In his opening statement, Committee Chairman Bo Kjellen (Sweden) said the Convention would only be effective if it were well publicized, particularly in the drylands. The general public must be made aware that the dryland issue was of global significance and that the Convention was a major part of the process set in motion by the 1992 Earth Summit, he added.

(more)

A Secretariat official informed the Committee that 95 countries and the European Union had signed the Convention, with South Africa becoming the ninety-sixth signatory yesterday.

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Some 350 international staff and volunteers working at the headquarters of the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) are to be moved to Mogadishu airport by the weekend, a spokesman for the Organization announced today. He stressed that the embassy compound housing the headquarters was not being evacuated. UNOSOM II currently has more than 8,000 troops in Somalia, including a 950-strong security battalion at the compound.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has issued more than 8,000 doses of vaccine to health facilities in north-eastern districts in Somalia, the spokesman said. The Fund also delivered 2,500 textbooks and other educational materials to a primary school in the north-east.

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The World Food Programme (WFP) and the Catholic Relief Services today signed a formal working agreement covering joint collaboration in emergency and long-term relief operations. This is the first time the WFP has entered into a formal working agreement with an international non-governmental organization.

The agreement aims to strengthen the provision of immediate food assistance and to promote socio-economic self-reliance among beneficiaries. It was signed by WFP Executive Director Catherine Bertini and Catholic Relief Services Executive Director Kenneth Hackett at the latter's headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland.

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